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## Interview with Emilio Martínez, CEO, AGNITIO Corp.

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Interview with Emilio Martínez, CEO, AGNITIO Corp.

**fb:** Can you give our readers a brief background of your company?

**A:** The Company was formed in 2004 and was a spin off from the University of Madrid where a team was working for almost 5 years with the Spanish police to develop a technology to identify people using voice. The technology was coming from the 90's but the company was founded in 2004. It's a private company owned by the founders of the company, myself and Javier Castano, who is currently the COO of the company and two venture capital funds: Nauta Capital in Barcelona and Elaia Partners in Paris. The company was mainly devoted to the markets of government agencies, law enforcement and military ...

for the first 5 to 10 years, where we were also developing and refining the technology. The products we developed enable Speaker recognition in forensic applications, criminal identification and phone surveillance solutions are currently being used in many countries in Europe.

A few years ago, we started to bring this technology to the commercial market: mainly financial institutions and call centers, where it can be used, for instance, to enable voice authentication of a person using a phone to reach a call center.

Our company is based in Madrid and Washington DC area, where we have a fully owned subsidiary. Most of the development team is in Madrid. In the US, we have another team of mainly sales and technical support. This is servicing all of our customers in the US.

**fb:** Your products are used in a variety of industries as you mentioned, the military and law enforcement, to mobile and financial, can you please review your product lineup for us?

**A:** I think it is important to understand how a small company like ours, which is about 30 people, can address so many markets. To do that, you have to understand the business model. We go to market through security integrators or Solution Service providers. We develop software that needs to be integrated into a solution. We concentrate on the ability to identify one person based on voice, generating the best API's in the market to do that. The same engine, with critical tweaking and adaptations can also be used in many different applications, when we partner with the application solution providers.

I can divide the markets into maybe 3 main areas. One is law enforcement and forensics, essentially police departments, and it is being used to provide evidence and building large databases of voices in the same way that you build large databases of fingerprints or DNA of criminals. You can build a database of the voices of criminals that can be used to identify, let's say a bomb threat... once the police are able to have that voice, they will know who that person is. We provide the engine that is inside those Identification solutions.

**AGNITIO**



Then we have the military, essentially intelligence. Our solutions are essentially being used in the field of operational communication and signal intelligence. We provide the ability to filter voices and spotting a few targets among a large number of conversations, that way and you can target just the one person that you are looking for.

And finally the other one is for remote identification. Remote identification is what we call collaborative biometrics... when you are dealing with a person who is willing to be identified and is counting on it. It is mainly used in call centres and mobile telephones. The main vertical markets are financial and telephone operators, although many other applications can use it in the future. You have to understand that this part of the market, that we have been working with for the last 2 or 3 years, is a small niche in our approach and there will be new applications coming in the future as well.

**FB:** You recently won the final in the Global Security Challenge supported by the technical support working group of the US government. Can you please tell us about that win?

**A:** Yes that is very interesting. It is a contest supported by US Government agency Technical Support Working Group (TSWG) and industry giant BAE Systems plc. GSC attracted more than 200 companies from 30 countries with unique technologies and great disruptive potential. It is held to select winning technology among many different start-ups and small and medium enterprises in the world that are working in the security arena. You have to go through a lot filtering. There are 6 regions in the world and we won the final Southern European region. And then we went to the finals in the UK where there were more than 16 companies selected and then the jury selected the top company. Last year we were selected as the winner and I believe that is one of the best awards that we have received, because it is recognition of the company and at the same time, and I think this is very important, it is an indication of how important Voice Biometrics are becoming for security around the world. So far biometrics have only been identified with fingerprints, face etc. and obviously those have always been related to security and the fact that a voice company was chosen as a winner last year, I think is a very good indicator of the interest of many companies and government organizations about the future of voice biometrics as a key technology for security. That is important also because it developed a good interaction with the TSWG group in the US and now we are trying to have more contracts with them to move forward and help to develop the technology as well.

**FB:** Congratulations on that! You also recently launched your KIVOX mobile solution. How does that work?

**A:** That is interesting. We had a challenge, how to make the technology work in a handheld device, so that when someone is not connected to any network, they can still identify someone using voice. That was a big challenge. So far all voice biometrics technology, except now ours, operated such that, the only way that it can work is by connecting to a server with data base matching... mainly because it's quite a lot of processing. Actually all of the so called mobile solutions of other companies are just using mobile as a channel to patch the voice into a server, do the matching and return ... yes or no. But it is really unique to do it when you are not connected, let's say when you are on a plane, when you are somewhere not at the office at home, when you don't have a good connection and when your connection is not very good... the data transfer can be slow or damaged. It is very important to be able to have identification through the mobile itself.

So what we finally did was, we were able to squeeze the technology so that it can work in a handheld device. At the beginning this was a project based on requirements from several government agencies in Europe and USA but based on those results, we developed KIVOX mobile, which I believe is the only solution today, which is able to provide voice matching and voice enrollment on a mobile device without the need for a network connection. We thought it will be a great idea if you could control your experience when you create your voice print. Instead of calling a remote call center, we can develop a small application which you can load on your mobile phone, and generate your voice print where you want, when you want... at your home. No connection, so security service. You can play with your voice print, how does it work with your family, with your friends and when you are happy with it and you are secure that your voice print is really working, you can transfer that voice print to any other server, application or call center so that you can later on, if you like, you could make a transaction. So that concept is new in the industry....bringing the experience of using your voice print into your smartphone and you are controlling the process and you can decide how and when it is going to be used. You can use any language that you want; it is completely language independent, so you don't have to worry about that. The same App can be used for Japanese, for Spanish or for English. Right now we are only working with beta testers and by invitation only. We are now in the third round of development and it is becoming really popular. This concept of local enrollment, you do the enrollment with your mobile



phone when you want and where you want and then it is transferred to the bank, for example, to do the authentication later. It is a new concept that Agnitio is providing the market.

**FB:** Well that may answer my next question, but it also reflects back to your earlier comments about the speech technology industry and my question is, why is speech technology gaining such momentum at this particular time?

**A:** I think Peter, probably two reasons. One is that finally we are bringing into the market technology that works. We have to accept that the voice biometrics technologies that were presented to the consumers in the past were rather weak. Meanwhile, at Agnitio, we have been developing our technology in very challenging environments like, intelligence surveillance, military, forensics...etc. This allowed us to develop a robust technology that had to be able to respond correctly to the demands of those markets. I believe that now, with technology like ours, growth is coming fast. The second thing is mobility. I believe that the fact that everyday people are bringing with them their mobile devices to their work, to the government agencies, even to the war ... and they are becoming like computers with very weak protection. We need to start protecting these mobile devices and making sure only the authorized individuals can have access to them. A natural way of doing that is voice. Let me also tell you one thing; voice biometrics, until now, has been only related or connected to authentication and there are more things you can do with voice biometrics, beyond authentication to improve security and fight identity fraud. One thing some of our partners are proposing is to bring the voices of the people that are committing fraud in call centers all over the world, into one database. Remember the case of Apple, in which a journalist was calling the telecom support of Apple and instead of him it was somebody else impersonating him and he was able to get a new password and he was able to raid everything in the journalist's mobile phone. Those people who are committing these fraud acts in call centers are very few, maybe 100's or 1,000's all over the world and they are repeat offenders, moving from one call center to another. Those voice prints can be used now in a black list and every single call that is being done to a call center, by a new person opening an account or for asking for information, can be filtered with the black list and those people will never be able to call again any other call center that is using a technology like ours. They would be identified immediately. The solution is easy to implement, doesn't break the work flow of the call center and is protecting your identity because if anyone else is pretending to be you, they will be identified very quickly. This is something that is now becoming very popular. This is just an example. There are many new applications like this now, mainly because the technology like ours has advanced dramatically. Applications are possible now, that nobody was even able to contemplate before, because the technology was not powerful enough. With this one example I just reviewed, you have to have real speech, you have to be independent of language and you have to be accurate enough and fast enough so that you don't interrupt the work of the call center. So this is possible today and it is something that our partners are taking advantage of and buying our technology to provide this service to banks, to financial institution and to call center operators.

**FB:** Emilio thank you very much for telling us about both your company and the industry at large. It sounds like things are going very well and congratulations again on your success and I look forward to hearing about your activities in the future.

**A:** Thank you Peter. It was a pleasure speaking with you.

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